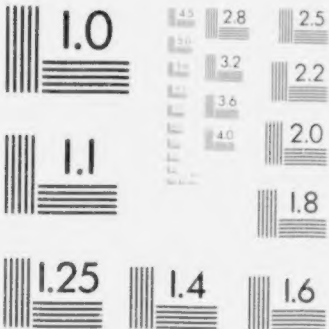


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**The Significance for Canadian History
of the Work of The Board of
Historical Publications**

by

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*The Significance for Canadian History of the Work of The Board of
Historical Publications*

By ADAM SHORTT, LL.D., C.M.G., F.R.S.C.

(Read May Meeting, 1919)

It has been remarked from time to time, not without a sub-acid implication as to the mere relativity of Historical Science, that every age demands the rewriting of history to suit its changing tastes and shifting interests. There is a sense in which this is not only quite true but is proof, also, of the progress of civilization and of the broadening interests of humanity. In Shakespeare's time, and earlier, it was bad form to treat seriously the lower orders of society otherwise than as necessary servants and dependents of the nobler orders of humanity. Broad-minded and versatile as he was, Shakespeare himself shows no interest in the lot of labourers, peasantry, and petty tradesmen. Their usefulness and fidelity to their masters are treated as of much the same nature as those of the dog or the horse. The more important virtues and the more interesting villainies are all reserved for the higher orders of society. With their deeds and misdeeds alone serious history is concerned. So far have we travelled since then, however, that we seem already to have passed well into the opposite quarter. We may even be inclined to take seriously the erstwhile facetious appeal "Spurn not the nobly born, nor the well-connected treat with scorn." Now-a-days, to be sufficiently poor to be afflicted by the high cost of living, is *prima facie* evidence of virtue. And yet there may be those who can remember when it was no particular disgrace to be rich.

In the transition from one of these extremes to the other, history has been continually broadening its scope. It is to history in its most disinterested form—a broad and impartial presentation of conditions as they have actually developed—that we may yet have to appeal to save us from many wild phases of economic and social doctrine. A study of history in its broadest sense is simply the intelligent appraisement of the development of a people or a nation, not merely in its outward political and international relations, but even more particularly in its social, economic, and intellectual progress. It involves a clear-visioned presentation of the varied experiences through which peoples or nations have passed in the constant attempts to improve their condition individually and collectively. It presents the outcome in failure or success of the numerous and varied experi-

ments which communities have made in settling new countries and in reducing the relatively unproductive wilderness to a fruitful basis for life, relative comfort, and even what the framers of the Declaration of Independence, with wise restraint, called "the *pursuit* of happiness."

In this connection it traces the growth of the varied institutions which constitute the articulated skeleton of society which supports the flexible social and economic life which clothes it with flesh and blood, making of it a living body; subject, however, unfortunately, to all the diseases which afflict these marvellous living mechanisms. Among the transitional forms through which the developing community passes, we have the change from a condition of predominantly rural to one of predominantly urban life. Here we trace the rise of the artisan and trading classes, the development of industry on a large scale, and the consequent emergence of those dread factors, the capitalist, the financier, the railway king, and all those high and mighty potentates of wealth, who can buy their way into almost anything, and even occasionally out of it again. Indeed, so complex has become this modern industrial and financial texture of society, and so far-reaching its relations, that even the controlling factors in it have lost trace of the real relations and connections of the parts with each other. Taking advantage of this general ignorance of relations, several new factors, with the avowed purpose of promoting their sectional interests, have undertaken to deny stoutly what have been long accepted as at least fundamental relations. They come forward with sweepingly radical propositions for readjusting values and connections, the effect of which shall be to eliminate all the more successful economic magnates, and, even without the formality of selling all they have, to give it to the poor.

Now the only satisfactory appeal in all such cases between those who would retain and those who would abolish the present economic and social orders, is the appeal to history. How did these complex structures grow up? What changes have they undergone in the process? And, so far as may be gathered from the past, what would be the reaction in the case of sudden and radical changes at the various stages in the process?

Not only therefore does a properly conceived presentation of historical facts afford an indispensable basis for the satisfactory answer to any intellectual questions which arise, as to the growth and present structure of modern society, but it affords the only satisfactory data for testing the relative truth of the rival analyses of industrial and political societies of the present day, and the consequent value of practical economic and political programmes which depend upon

the soundness of these analyses. It is desirable, of course, that there may be as little dispute as possible as to what it is that history teaches with reference to this or that problem. It is necessary, therefore, not only to set forth a conscientious view of historical facts, but, as far as possible, the actual documents, or at least the most important of them, arranged in such a manner that they may be the most readily accessible, not only at large, but in their natural historical relations with each other, in point of time, place, and similar interests. It is the object of the Board of Historical Publications to furnish in the case of Canada such first-hand historical material in the most readily available form.

The publications of the Board have no special appeal to make, and no special message to deliver. Actual national life presents many conflicting ideals, many rival interests, and many different programmes of action, and therefore a great variety of actual experiences. Some of these gain the ear of the majority at one time, some at another. Many ideas are broached but lie dormant, sometimes forgotten, sometimes kept alive by a few ardent disciples. Then may arise special crises and reactions from more popular courses which have disappointed the expectations of the majority. Suddenly propositions long held as mere theories, or more recently formulated, step into the street and become the main-springs of action. Obviously, an adequate documentary history will present all these conflicting measures without favour or bias, leaving to the teacher, the student, or the intelligent reader to reach his own conclusions as to their validity or significance. They do at least furnish the record of experience—the basis of all wisdom.

Owing to the peculiar relations which Canada bore to the mother country, both as a French and as an English colony, and the necessity for a constant interchange of information and instructions, special facts, views, and interests, there was produced and accumulated a remarkable body of documentary records embodying the chief facts of Canadian history. There is a greater variety than might be expected, in the presentation of the facts and views, since there were several effective channels, public and private, through which these might be presented and appeals made to the imperial authorities. Thus in the long run most currents of colonial life were represented in one form or another, whether for approval or condemnation, in criticism or defence. Much local material, considerable private correspondence, and many descriptive accounts of the country and the condition of the people have been preserved and recovered. Early newspapers and pamphlets, though many of them rare or unique, and

quite scattered in their location, are also extant and furnish a very necessary atmosphere of fact and comment for the more central and official documents. Owing to the very volume of this material, even so far as collected at the Archives in Ottawa, and more so as scattered in various Canadian centres, it is possible for only a very limited number of students to consult it. To do so requires at once a strong personal interest, a special historical training, the necessary leisure, and last, but far from least, the requisite means, to enable one at all adequately to consult the documentary and other evidence necessary to satisfactory results. The successful student must spend not merely weeks but months, or even years, according to the nature and extent of his researches, first in locating and afterwards in examining, comparing and transcribing the materials necessary for accurate first-hand work. Needless to say, it is still more difficult for those beyond the limits of Canada, whether in other parts of the British Empire, in the United States, or other foreign countries, to avail themselves of the varied treasures of our Archives. If, therefore, our Canadian history is to be known in authentic form, not only to our own people, but to the outside world, whose interest in Canada is steadily rising, it requires the facilities for direct knowledge to be greatly increased. It is necessary to put in available form the chief documents relating to the various phases of the country's history.

In order that these documents may be of the greatest service it is desirable that, in addition to being arranged chronologically, they shall be classified according to the chief interests which were developed in the country. They should, for instance, enable us to trace the original settlement of the country with the sources of its population, the condition of their arrival, and the terms of their settlement, the origin and growth of the various political institutions, local and general, the foundation and extension of trade relations both domestic and foreign, the opening of the means of transport and communication, the first establishment and future growth of the instruments of exchange, and the public finances, etc. This arrangement according to the chief national interests, is also the most suitable and effective for cross-reference, as in tracing the influences of these factors on each other. In fact as many combinations as are desired may be readily effected without confusion.

While, of course, only the documents of primary importance, or containing the fullest and most typical treatment of any special events, can be presented in full, reference to many secondary documents and a few of the more important extracts from them will be furnished in the foot-notes; thus enabling the documents to serve as guides to

further or more detailed studies of the various sections of Canadian History.

The volumes issued by the Board will not, of course, take the place of detailed researches by students of special historical problems. They should, however, furnish the training ground for specialists by preparing a broad highway into the land of original documents and other first-hand materials, encouraging an increasing number of students to undertake more detailed researches into scores of unexplored sections of Canadian History. For all such special researches our volumes should furnish a general background and a reliable atmosphere uniting and relating the special researches to each other and to the general history of the country. The general programme as mapped out is as follows:

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL

1. Constitutional Development to Confederation
 - (a) Ontario and Quebec.
 - (b) Maritime Provinces.
 - (c) Western Provinces.
2. External Relations, including Boundaries.
3. Militia and Defence.
4. Immigration and Settlement, including Land Granting.
5. Municipal Development.
6. Indian Relations and Exploration, including operations of Hudson's Bay and Northwest Companies.
7. Relations of Church and State, including Clergy Reserves, etc.
8. Education, Literature, Art, etc.

ECONOMIC

1. Public Finance and Taxation.
2. Currency, Banking and Exchange.
3. Trade:
 - (a) Domestic.
 - (b) Foreign.
4. Transportation:
 - (a) Shipping, including Canals, Shipbuilding, etc.
 - (b) Highways and Railroads.
 - (c) Postal Developments.
5. Agriculture.
6. Fisheries, marine and inland.
7. Industry: labour, manufacturing, lumbering, mining, etc.

The purposes aimed at in setting forth so large a programme in advance are chiefly these: First, it will serve to avoid doubt and possible confusion in the classification of documents to know what are the various sections under which they may be grouped. Thus, when one is tempted to incorporate an important but only partially related document in any volume in preparation at a given time, one can safely set it aside, knowing that it will find more appropriate place in another volume reserved for the future. Secondly, in going through the masses of miscellaneous manuscript documents, it will accomplish a very great saving of time for the future, if one can note and classify for subsequent reference those documents which are not of special interest to the subject in hand, but which are certain to be of special importance for other volumes to follow.

The documents will be given from the most authentic sources available and in the language in which they were prepared or officially presented. In the English edition the French documents will be given in the original but will be followed by an English translation, while in the French edition the original French documents will remain unaltered while the English documents will appear in French translations.

Apart from the revision and reissue of the first volume of Constitutional Documents, 1759-1791, for some time out of print, and now nearing completion, the new subjects at present in preparation are three in number. First, the largest and in some respects the most important, is that of the original settlement of the various sections of Canada. This will deal with the sources of our population, the occasion of the coming to this country, the inducements and assistance afforded by the government, as also the restrictions imposed on certain aliens, the terms on which lands were granted, and the variation from time to time of these terms and conditions. This is a large and complex subject and the documents relating to it will fill several volumes, but it is fundamental to the study of all other phases of Canadian History. The second is the constitutional development of the earliest English administration in Canada, that namely in Nova Scotia, which originally covered the three maritime provinces. This furnishes the necessary link between the earlier constitutional organization, in the various types of British Colonial Establishments in America, and the later administration in Canada after the Conquest, and still later in British Columbia and the Northwest Territories, originally occupied by the Hudson's Bay Company. The completion of this treatment will require the presentation of the French Constitutional Development to the periods of the taking over of the

French dominions, in the east under the Treaty of Utrecht, and in the west under the Treaty of Paris. The third subject is one of economic and financial interest, the establishment and development of the instruments and processes of exchange, or the Monetary and Foreign Exchange History of Canada from the earliest French period down to Confederation, at least, after which the documents are fairly generally available.

Such is the programme immediately before the Board and it is hoped to place the volumes to be issued in all public and educational libraries throughout Canada, as, also, in the leading general and historical libraries in the British Empire and the United States, and in allied and other countries so far as they manifest an interest in our history, and this is already very general. They will also be available at moderate cost for private possession by historians, journalists, teachers and others who manifest an interest in the authentic history of the country.